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Feminism and nationalism in South Korea: empowering Korean women during the nation-building process**

Abstract

Since the time of its emergence in the late 19th century, Korean feminism had close ties with the development of nationalism, which initially opposed the political conservatism of the Joseon Dynasty and later opposed the aggressive colonial regime that hampered the establishment of a nation-state. After liberation from the Japanese colonialism, Korean feminism developed within as pro-government, nationalistic ideology (conservative groups), and as the movement for democratization (progressists). The inextricable link between nationalism and feminism led to the creation of diversity of feminist concepts and views on the nature of women's liberation, which equally, though differently, was comprised by Korean nationalists. The liberalization of South Korean politics and economy at the end of 1980s – early 1990s resulted in the emergence of postmodern feminism, which raised essentially new issues of women's development such as the elimination of domestic violence against women, protection of rights of sexual minorities, elimination of discrimination against women in the labor market, etc. Thus, the evolution of Korean feminist ideology reflects the significant challenges of national development in the nation-building process.

Key words: nationalism, feminism, nation-building, economic modernization, democratization, women's empowerment

Introduction

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In 2012, for the first time in the political history of South Korea, a woman was elected the president. A winner of the presidential elections was Park Geun-hye, the elder daughter of military dictator and president of the Republic of Korea Park Chung-hee (1961-1979). Though Park Geun-hye was a second woman-politician who nominated her candidacy for the presidency in South Korea[1], she became the first who could win presidential elections. Park Geun-hye's election campaign attracted a significant interest from the international and Korean feminist organizations, many of which truly believed that her presidency would contribute to the development of women's rights in the country that is known for its male-dominated politics and patriarchal political culture.

Park Geun-hye skillfully used a feminist rhetoric in her presidential campaign by adopting a slogan, a "prepared woman president", as campaign's slogan. In 1997, Kim Dae-jung used practically the same slogan but without a reference to gender. The slogan of his presidential campaign was a "prepared president," which was to stress the Kim Dae-Jung's preparedness to become the president of South Korea because he had nominated his candidacy for the presidency for the fourth time. Stressing feminity of the candidate, Park Geun-hye was to symbolize a "new era of hope" in South Korean politics based on the principles of gender equity. Overall, her win ought to testify to the progressiveness and civility of the modern South Korean society.

It is true that despite Park Geun-hye's history-making win, her election has split both the feminist organizations and the Korean society as a whole. For the female participants of the student and labor movements for democratization (1970-1980), Park Geun-hye was just the embodiment of her father, Park Chung-hee, and they even refused to consider her as a woman[2]. The progressive Korean feminists, who participated in the movement against Park Chung-hee's and his successor's authoritarian regime, eventually could not support Park Geun-hye's candidacy during the presidential campaign in 2012. They found

[1] In 1987, Hong Sook-ja was nominated for the presidency from the Social Democratic Party but later withdrew her candidacy and supported Kim Yong-sam during presidential elections.

[2] In August 2016, I interviewed 15 female participants of the student movement for democratization (1970-1980), many of whom noted that biologically Park Geun-hye could be identified as a woman, but socially and politically she was far from being a woman because she had not expressed any solidarity with women's needs in Korea.

her image of the selfless daughter of Korea, never married, without children, sincerely dedicated to the Korean nation, to be a far-fetched PR trick. Unfortunately, the progressive Korean feminists could not significantly influence the results of the presidential elections, and Park Geun-hye finally won the campaign, owing largely to the political legacy of her father[3].

The political scandal around Park Geun-hye and her shadowy advisor and friend Choi Soon-sil erupted in South Korea at the end of October 2016. It caused a surge of negative emotions from the Korean feminists, who at this time were united in their attitudes towards the first woman president, who as they thought had discredited not only the nation but all Korean women. The scandal provoked a vigorous debate among Korean feminists over the issues of women's participation in politics: "What do we mean by a 'woman president,' what do we expect from a woman president, should we stress the feminity of a women president?" On November 26, 2016, the representatives of 30 female organizations held a joint meeting at the Kwanghwamun central square in Seoul to express non-confidence in Park Geun-hye's government and their worries about some gender issues caused by the anti-Park Geun-hye's protests. Firstly, they worried that Park's impeachment would lead to stronger resistance to women in positions of power[4]. Secondly, they were dissatisfied with a misogynistic tone to much of the criticism of Park Geun-hye. During anti-Park's demonstrations, one could hear how protesters, males, and mass media often called Park Geun-hye a 'hen', 'Miss Park', or 'Kangnam ajumma' [in this case, a contemptuous treatment of Park Geun-hye, which was to stress that she was just a woman from the luxurious district Kangnam (Seoul), and not a true president][5]. The feminists worried that

[3] Park Pauline. Hillary Clinton and Park Geun-hye: a progressive feminist analysis of presidential politics in the US and Korea: https://www.paulinepark.com/2017/01/hillary-clinton-park-geun-hye-a-progressive-feminist-analysis-of-presidential-politics-in-the-us-korea/ (accessed 22.11.2017); A lecture by Lee Jin-ok ("About Future Politics after 'woman' president Park Geun-hye"), a representative of the Korean Women's Political Solidarity, organized by the Women's Hotline (non-governmental organization), 09.02.2017: https://hotline.or.kr:41759/news/30473?ckattempt=1 (accessed 22.11.2017)

[4] Miranda Watson. Being Bold For Changes: South Korea's Online Feminist Movement by Miranda Watson: https://theowp.org/reports/being-bold-for-change-south-koreas-online-feminist-movement/ (accessed 22.11.2017)

[5] Lee Yu-jin. A Feminist Declaration "Don't Betray and Don't Humiliate 'Women'": http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/772101.html#csidxe228d14725e0e4ebf7910035399a189 (accessed 21.11.2017); Megha Rajagopalan, Lee Jihye. This is what

misogynistic discourse could negatively affect the women's empowerment in South Korea. Thirdly, they explained the reasons for the Park Geun-hye's dramatic downfall by the power structure in South Korea. For feminists, Park Geun-hye's political power was based on the close ties with chaebols, large Korean corporations, that used people as tools for their own empowerment and enrichment. This power structure implied patriarchal relationships between the subjects entrusted with authority, who were capable of influencing the decision-making in the Korean society. Thus, for the South Korean feminists, the Park Geun-hye's downfall illustrated the persistence of the traditional gender norms that so far determined the power relations in Korea, which is contrary to the declared gender equity and adherence to liberal values [6].

During the political crisis in South Korea, the question about the restructuring of power relationships has emerged again in the feminist agenda. This question was actually outside the feminists' attention since the democratic transition of the Republic of Korea in 1987. The roots of the issue lie in Korean nationalism, and in particular in the complicated interactions between nationalism and feminism throughout the modern history of Korea. The present paper aims to demonstrate how the feminist thought and movement was developed in South Korea, and how feminism correlated with various forms of Korean nationalism during the building of a modern nation-state based on the rule of law and democracy.

The origins of feminist thought in Korea

Korean feminism emerged within the old Confucian culture during the declining years of the Joseon Dynasty. It flourished under the Japanese colonial rule, acquired mature forms and ideological diversity. Unlike Western feminism, which appeared under the conditions of a developing industrial economy, gradual adopting by the emerging nation-state the concept of civil society as a core of its national ideology, Korean feminism arose under the absolute monarchy and semi-feudal economy.

South Korean Women Think of Their President's Impeachment: https://www.buzzfeed.com/meghara/the-fall-of-south-koreas-president-has-exposed-a-ton-of-sexi?utm_term=.bkb0BRGE5#.em45d6oGM (accessed 21.11.2017)

[6] Lee Yu-jin. A Feminist Declaration "Don't Betray and Don't Humiliate 'Women'": http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/society_general/772101.html (accessed 21.11.2017)

If the Western feminist movement started from the women's struggle for suffrage and equal property rights, the starting point of Korean feminism was a movement for the female education. Korean male intellectuals were the first who raised the issue of women's education. The leaders of the Enlightenment movement (*gaehwa undong*), Yu Gil-jun, Park Yeong-hyo, told in their works about the equality of women and men in the West, highlighting female education system as a major factor in the progressive development of European countries. Later, the leaders of the "Independence club" (*Dongnip hyeophoe*) developed the ideas of women's education based on the western standards. Both the Enlightenment movement and the Independence club identified the issue of women's education as a prerequisite for the formation of a modern nation-state[7]. By advancing female education as a primary step of enriching Korean women with human rights, Korean intellectuals attempted to reevaluate traditional roles of women. They strived to escape from the old Confucian past to modernity, to create a new Korean society, where women's illiteracy would be no longer ignored. The Korean newspapers, edited in the late XIX- early XX centuries (*Dongnip sinmun, 1896, Hwangseong sinmun, 1898, Jeguk sinmun, 1898, Daehan maeil sinbo, 1904*) were "mediators of producing a new "people" (min) called *sinmin, inmin, kungmin*, and summoning women as members of this new "people" in to the public sphere"[8].

In spite of the emergence of women's rights issue within the discourse of enlightenment and modernity initiated by Korean intellectuals, it was very limited and elitist. The more significant targets of the discourse were socio-political institutes of the Joseon state, which confronted modernity, and, as a consequence, the formation of the nation-state. In this regard, the problems of female education were always subordinate to the more tangible tasks of national development, such as demolition of absolute monarchy and creation of a new political system that is based on the division of power and the rule of law. Moreover, the aims of developing female education did not go beyond the concept of "wise mother and good wife", which became a motto of female education in the school system under the Japanese rule. According to this concept, women were to be

[7] Kenneth M. Wells, 'The Price of Legitimacy: Women and the Kŭnuhoe Movement, 1927-1931' in *Colonial Modernity in Korea*. Ed. By Gi-Wook Shin, Michael Robinson. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999, p.198-199.
[8] Suh Jiyoung, 'The "New Women" and the Topography of Modernity in Colonial Korea', *Korean Studies*, Vol. 37, 2014, p.15.

educated for the sake of better education for their children, rational operation of the household and effective support of their husbands. This approach to women's education did not allow to break away from the prevalence of patriarchy. It simply reformulated the tasks of women's development, while retaining the rudiments of Confucian ethics. As before, motherhood remained an essential feature of women's social duties that determined their life and well-being within the Korean society[9]. Even the first women's social organization, which was created by the upper class married women in 1898, the Praise and Encouragement Society (*Chanyanghoe*) acted according this approach. The major achievement of the Society was an establishment of the first women's educational institute in Korea, the *Sunseong* Girls' School. As an elitist women's association, the Praise and Encouragement society had a limited sphere of influence and scopes. "Largely composed of the privileged, such organizations upheld the power of women in a high society whose sense of *noblesse oblige* prompted them to educate their less-fortunate sisters"[10]. Neither the Society nor the *Sungseong* Girls' School functioned for a long time. In 1900, the Society was dismissed, and sometime later, the School was closed. However, by insistently promoting female education, the leaders of the Society stimulated the governing Kojeon Emperor and its government to move towards establishing female schools[11].

The colonial modernization and development of national liberation movement under the Japanese rule resulted in the emergence of the first

[9] In 1930-1940s, the traditional concept of motherhood that dominated throughout the Joseon era was reconsidered by the Japanese colonial authorities in terms of the modern nationalism. According to a new approach, a woman was not just a mother, who raised children and took care of the family, but also a subject of the nation, and as such could significantly contribute to the prosperity and empowerment of the Japanese nation. It explains why the colonial authorities actively encouraged the involvement of Korean women in the industrial production and the public awareness campaigns for mobilization of the nation's spirit (국민총력운동). *The Modern and Contemporary History of Korean Women* (한국 근현대여성사). Ed. By Jeon Kyung-eok, Yu Suk-ran, Kim Eun-sil, Sin Hui-seon. Vol. 1, Seoul, 2011, pp.87-88.

[10] Kim Janice, *To Live to Work. Factory Women in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945,* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009, p.8.

[11] Lee Seong-hee, *Korean Women in the Modern History* (근대사 속의 한국 여성), Seoul, 2014, p.56.

female journals [12] and all-national female organizations including representatives of different social backgrounds. For the first time in Korean history, women established politically oriented organizations: the Patriotic Women's Society (*Aeguk buinhoe*), the Women's Society for Korean Independence (*Daehan dognnip buinhoe*), the Socialist Leag of Korean Women (*Joseon yeoseong donguhoe*), the *Geunuhoe* (Friends of the Rose of Sharon), etc. As Kim Heisook noted, "Many women thought that participation in independence movements was a way to attain equality with men. Thus, feminism and nationalism were not in conflict because women could find escape through nationalist movements without scruples regarding activity outside their home. Nationalism awakened women to the logic that they could do something meaningful for themselves, for the family (especially their fathers, brothers, and sons), and for their own home"[13].

During the Japanese occupation, Korean feminist groups divided ideologically into three directions: socialist, cultural nationalism, and Christian (Protestant missionaries). Aside from these three groups stood Korean women novelists and artists, such as Na Hye-seok, Kim Won-ju, Kim Myeon-seon, who developed their ideas on feminity through novels, paintings, and journalism. By their provocative style of behavior, open criticism of patriarchy and traditional views on Korean women's duties, they were called New Women (*sinyeoseong*) by Korean mass media, comparing them to Old-Fashioned Women. The latter were regarded "as living behind the times, helpless and isolated from the changes accompanied by new lifestyles and new ideas, staying indoors or in the countryside, and adhering to feudal conventions"[14]. Unlike the women-socialists or women-Protestants, united within Young Women Christian Association (YWCA, 1922), New Women suggested a completely new approach to understanding women's chastity and body[15]. Factually, they

[12] The first female journal was "The Woman's World" (여자계) that was published in 1917-1920. In 1920, by the initiative of Kim Il-ryeop "The New Woman" (신여자) was created, but only four issues of the journal were published. From 1923 to 1934 the Gaebyeok Publishing House published a female magazine "The New Woman" (신여성) .

[13] Kim Heisook, Feminist Philosophy in Korea: Subjectivity of Korean Women, *Signs*, Vol. 34, No.2, 2009, p. 248.

[14] Suh Jiyoung, 'The "New Women" and the Topography of Modernity in Colonial Korea', p. 26.

[15] Rhee Jooyeon, '«No Country for the New Woman»: Rethinking Gender and Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea through Kim Myŏngsun', *Acta Koreana*, vol. 17, No.1, 2014,

were the first who initiated a discourse on women's sexuality in Korean culture. Although both socialists, Protestants and cultural nationalists arose the issues of women's liberation. While for Christians, women's liberation was achieved through love for God, for socialists and nationalists, it was attained through national liberation. However, New Women thought about women's liberation exclusively in the framework of individual freedom. In this sense, they tried to escape from a Confucian tradition based on patriarchy, within which the woman's body had always entirely belonged to the family, and never to her as an individual. [16]

Although the colonial modernization led to expansion of women's social duties by involving them in the developing industries, commerce services, and education through public schools for girls, it did not influence the change of women's legal status. It remained as low as it was under the Joseon Dynasty. As previously, women did not have a legal right to inherit or to be the head of the family, "unless she was the only one in the family. A married woman could own property, but her husband had the right to control it. Unfaithfulness was a basis for divorce to a wife but not to a husband"[17]. For this reason, some Korean scholars do not mention a period of the Japanese occupation when analyzing the development of Korean feminism[18]. They consider that because there were no essential changes in the social status of women under the Japanese rule, there was no need to point out this period intentionally.

The colonial regime had no specific policy aimed at improving women's social status. The policy of modernization, which indirectly contributed to the awakening of women's social conscience, was based on

pp.399-427; Speaking about Na Hye-seok (나혜석을 말한다). Ed. By the Society for Studying Na Hye-seok's Literary Works and Paintings. Seoul: Deoso chulpan hwangeumal Publishing Comp., 2016, pp. 82-91.

[16] Protestant missionaries significantly contributed to the women's enlightenment in Korea, but, as Choi Hyaeweol rightly noted, they tried to stay within a Confucian tradition as much as they could. The young Koreans who attended mission girls' schools were under close watch by the administration. The missionaries' adherence to religiosity and domesticity practically made impossible for their pupils to reconsider the traditional views on gender and body. Choi Hyaeweol, *Gender and Mission. Gender and Mission Encounters in Korea: New Women, Old Ways*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009, pp.104-107.

[17] Koh Whang-kyung, 'The Status of Women in Korea', *Pi Lambda Theta Journal*, vol. 27, No. 3, 1949, p. 154.

[18] Shim Young-hee, 'Changes of Women's Policy in Korea during the recent 30 year', *Gender and Society* 6 (2), 2009, pp. 9-44; Chong H. Kelly, *Deliverance and Submission. Evangelical Women and the Negotiation of Patriarchy in South Korea,* Cambridge and London*:* Harvard University Press, 2008.

the principles of inequality and hierarchy of the Japanese and Korean cultures, capitals, and people. The technical and economic improvements that accompanied colonial modernization could not overcome the underdevelopment of the Korean economy as a whole. Therefore, the double-standard policies of the Japanese government resulted in hybridization of the colonizers' and the colonized cultures[19]. Regarding Korean women, it meant that even though their life became more multifaceted and malleable to adopting modernity, it continued to be based on patriarchy and inequality.

Feminism and Nationalism after Liberation of Korea: From Integrity to Controversy

The liberation of Korea from the Japanese colonialism in August 1945 led to an unprecedented political activity of the Korean people. Korean nationalist and left-wing socialist groups started their political activities with a renewed vigor. Driven by the desire to establish as soon as possible an independent Korean state that was free from the disgraceful remnants of the semi-feudal colonial past, Korean nationalists and communists suggested various ideologies and projects of the future nation-state. Fairly soon after the liberation, Korean communists were out of the political power in South Korea, giving way to the extreme rightist nationalists such as Rhee Syng-man, Lee Beom-seok, An Ho-sang, and others.

Rhee Syng-man, the first president of the Republic of Korea, Lee Beom-seok, the prominent leader of the Korean youth groups and the first prime minister, and An Ho-sang, the first minister of education, understood Korean nationalism in their own way. However, all of them shared the view that the state is a foundation of the Korean nation. An Ho-sang wrote that: "If the home is a house of the family, the state is a house of the nation. The state is more precious than an individual or class. The state is bigger than any public organization or political party. The essence of the life, as well as one nation's nature, reveals itself through the highest appreciation of the state and nation [by the people]"[20]. By focusing on the state and by evaluating it as a core of the Korean nation, *minjeok*, South Korean political leadership put the interest of the state (governing regime)

[19] Kim Janice C.H., *To Live to Work. Factory Women in Colonial Korea, 1910-1945*, p.11.

[20] Cit. by Park Chan-seung, *The Nation and Nationalism* (민족-민족주의), Seoul: Doseo chulpan sohwa, 2010, p. 229.

above the interests of its citizens. This understanding of the Korean nation and the state led to contradictions between Korean feminism and nationalism.

As Kim Hei-sook rightly noted, feminism and nationalism clashed after the liberation of Korea. "Women's primary role had been defined as being the mother (homemaker) who was supposed to perpetuate the traditional family clan by giving birth to sons in accordance with Confucian values. While actively participating in the process of Westernization understood as modernization, most Korean men, including nationalists, ironically thought feminism was Western propaganda that should be blamed for women's neglect of family values"[21]. According to the Constitution of the Republic of Korea, women were granted equal rights with men in all spheres of social life. At that time, Korean women called these changes in their legal status a "dual liberation", because they were liberated both politically and socially[22]. For the first time, four Korean women were elected to the Korean Interim Legislative Assembly (1946-1948), and later, one woman was elected to the National Assembly of the first convocation (Im Yeong-sin, Women's National Party of Korea, 1948-1950). However, the declared formal equality of men and women in civil rights was not accompanied by changes in the family law, inheritance rights, and protection of maternity and childhood. In 1949, in the article about a social status of Korean women soon after liberation, Koh Whang-kyung expressed hope that the newly established South Korean government would adopt laws that truly guarantee equal rights to women[23].

Theoretically, the Rhee Syng-man's conception of nation-state, known as the One-People Principle (*ilminjuui*), implied a model of liberal democracy with national specifics. It was quite a primitive and one-sided ideology, which was more clearly formulated in the works of An Heo-sang than those of Rhee Syng-man. The ideology mainly aimed to unite the Korean nation against the threat of Communism and the Soviet Union while stressing the deep roots of the Korean culture and people, and the great importance of the state consolidating the nation. In spite of the obvious statism and extreme nationalism, the One-People Principle comprised the basic ideas of democracy and civil society. Thus, the

[21] Kim Hei-sook, Feminist Philosophy in Korea: Subjectivity of Korean Women, p. 248.
[22] Koh Whang-kyung, The Status of Women in Korea, p. 155.
[23] Ibidem.

ideologists of the First Republic of Korea created a controversy between political reality and official propaganda.

In broad terms, Koreans understood democracy as a rule by the people. Then, the question arose: "If women were only formally granted equal rights with men while being excluded from the decision-making processes in South Korea under Rhee Syng-man's regime, then who were the people?" Since the beginning of the South Korean state, women's public organizations raised a question about the equal distribution of political power. The other urgent tasks of women's development were reforms in marriage, divorce, inheritance laws, and child custody. The main task, from the point of reforming family law, was an abolition of the family-head system (*hojuje*), which was a core of patriarchal rights in Korean society. The family-head system substantially constrained the development of women's rights in South Korea, maintaining patriarchy and gender inequality. "From early on, the women's movement in Korea recognized the *hojuje as* a symbol of discrimination against women and worked very diligently to change and eventually abolish the law."[24] However, it took a long time to achieve all of those goals that were stated by the Korean women's movement soon after the liberation.

In the 1950s, among the organizations advocating for legal reforms in the family law, there was the Federation of Korean Women's Groups (*Daehan yeoseong danche hyeobihoe*) headed by Lee Tae-young (1914-1998), the first female lawyer in Korea. The Federation consisted of seven groups: the Korean Association of University Women *(Daehan yeohaksa hyeobihoe*), Korean Association of YWCA (*Daehan YWCA yeonhaphoe*), Korean Women's Association (*Daehan Buinhoe*), Society for the Research of Women's Issues (*Yeoseong munje yeonguhoe*), Korea Women's Christian Temperance Union (*Daehan yeoja gidokkyo jeoljehoe*), Korea Catholic Women's Association (*Daehan cheonjugyo buinhoe),* and Korea Buddhist Women's Association (*Daehan pulgyo buinhoe*)[25]. In 1959, many of these groups founded the Korean National Council of Women (KNCW), which became the most important female organization during the Park Chung-hee military dictatorship. Later, the KNCW joined the International Council of Women and its founding

[24] Oh Jaelim, 'Women's Political Participation and the Change of Family Law – A Case Study of the Abolition Process of Family Head System (the Hojuje) in Korea', *Asian Women* 23 (2), 2007, p. 100.

[25] Kim Seung-kyung, *The Korean Women's Movement and the State: Bargaining for Change*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 21.

president Kim Hwal-lan, who was one of the prominent female leaders of Korea in the 20th century.

Under Rhee Syng-man and Park Chung-hee's regimes, only pro-government organizations could survive. As Sohn Seong-young wrote, "In such a conservative era pro-Japanese people were predominantly those with power and a majority of pro-Japanese people continued to serve as leaders of women's organizations"[26] . For example, Kim Hwal-lan, as a leader of YWCA and the first Korean president of Ewha University, was also known for her collaborative ties with the Japanese colonial authorities. In spite of her spotty reputation, she continued to play a leading role in women's movement in 1950-60s.

The authoritarian regimes constrained the development of women's rights in South Korea through the revival of conservative family values and resistance to structural reforms of the family law. As a result, the women's policy had a limited scope, covering mainly the most vulnerable women such as low-income mothers, prostitutes, and unwed mothers. Although Park Chung-hee officially did not deny democracy and liberalism, which made possible development of feminism in the West, he reconsidered them in terms of the Korean nationalism. "Nationalistic democracy" of Park Chung-hee implied the superiority of the nation over the individual. According to Park Chung-hee, individual freedoms and human rights guarantees could not ensure stability and state's efficiency. He truly believed that democratic elections weakened the nation's strength by threatening its stability and security[27]. In order to justify his own views on liberal values, he suggested distinguishing between "big freedom" (*keun jayu*) and "little freedom" (*jageun jayu*). At the current stage of the national development, Koreans had to sacrifice their "little

[26] Sohn Seong-young, 'The Women's Movements in Korea: Transition and Prospects', *Asian Women*, 9, 1999, p. 29.

[27] Kim Ji-hyung, The Dismantling and Continuance of the Governing Ideology of Park Chung Hee from 1960s to 1970s: Centering round Mutual Constraints of Anticommunism and Democracy (1960-1970 년대 박정희 통치이념의 변용과 지속 – 민주주의와 반공주의 및 상호관계를 중심으로), *Minjujuui-wa ingwon* (Journal of Democracy and Human Rights), 2013, № 13 (2), pp.178-180.

freedom" to achieve "big freedom" that meant, in his opinion, the uprooting of Communism and advancing the economic growth[28].

It is not surprising that under authoritarian regime there was no progress on the development of women's rights in South Korea. Shim Young-hee called the women's policy led by the South Korean government in 1945-1980s a "residual welfare policy," stating that "there was no proper women's policy specifically targeted at women in general" [29]. The most massive women's organization in the 1970s, the New Village Women's Association, whose membership reached 3 million by 1979[30], was created to support political agenda of the Park Chung-hee regime and to maintain the traditional image of women as "wise mother and good wife." In 1979, a South Korean scholar, Yoon Soon Young, wrote that "in the name of nationalism, Korean wives and mothers are told to be self-sacrificing "virtuous women." In the name of nationalism, activists are told to do things the "Asian way" - quietly, without the aggressive marches and public demonstrations of the Western women's movement"[31]. All of this meant that the structural reforms of the family law and empowering of women were possible within the fundamentally new political surroundings free of extreme nationalism and authoritarianism.

Empowering Women through Democratization and Economic Modernization

In the 1970s, the intensive industrialization and modernization of the South Korean economy led to a rapid urbanization and a gradual increase in household incomes. South Korea was changing its image as an agrarian and underdeveloped country, and along with this was changing its social structure. The growing working class and students launched the movement for democratization, demanding political liberalizations, namely, guarantees of civil and political rights, such as freedom of

[28] Kang Jung-in, Ha Sang-bok. Park Chung-hee's Political Thought: Illiberal Conservatism for Modernization (박정희의 정치사상 – 반자유주의적 근대화 보수주의), *Hyeondae jeonchi yeongu* (현대정치연구), 2012, № 5, p.203.

[29] Shim Young-hee, 'Changes of Women's Policy in Korea During the Recent 30 Year', *Gender and Society* 6 (2), 2007, p. 12.

[30] Kim Seung-kyung, The Korean Women's Movement and the State: Bargaining for Change, p. 23.

[31] Yoon Soon Young, 'The Labor of Women: Work and Family', *Signs*, Vol. 4, No.4, p. 758.

assembly and expression, and ensuring space for civil society activism. The pro-democracy movement consisted of many social and religious groups, including female organizations. The largest female organizations that opposed the dictatorship were the Christian Academy, Korea Church Women United (*Hanguk gyeohoe yeoseong yeonhaphoe*). Although formally these were female religious organizations, they had specific political goals. The Christian Academy, which was headed by Kang Won-ryeong, functioned as an educational organization to train labor activists. Korea Church Women United (KCWU) "took a leading role in condemning sex tourism, and exposing government's complicity with it"[32]. KCWU supported families of political prisoners and the labor movement.

The participation in the movement for democratization allowed Korean women to declare themselves as politically motivated social activists instead of merely "wise mothers and good housewives." Women's economic participation rate had been continuously growing since the 1960s. It was 26.8% in 1960, 36.5 in 1970, 42.8 in 1980, and 47.0% in 1990[33]. Along with the growth of female workers, the number of female students steadily increased at the end of 1970s – early 1980s. In Pae Eun-kyeong's opinion, who was a professor of sociology and women's studies at Seoul National University, it was an important factor for the awakening of the political conscience of young Korean women[34]. Female students started to participate in the movement for democratization following the example of their progressive male classmates, who had been already engaged in the *minjung* movement. One of the respondents, who was interviewed by me in August 2016, said that only 20 % of students regularly attended the classes at the university in the early 1980s, while the rest were engaged in the opposition activities. It meant that if someone stayed in class, he or she could be treated as a pro-government, conservative person, and non-progressive.

In the late 1970s, Korean youth became "increasingly discontented with the traditional constraints of arranged marriages, sex segregation, classical education, and the taboos of discussing sexual morality"[35]. The increasing interest of Korean youth in the problems of women's

[32] Kim Seung-kyung, The Korean Women's Movement and the State, p.23.
[33] Shim Young-hee, Changes of Women's Policy in Korea During the Recent 30 Year, p. 20.
[34] Interview with Pae Eun-kyung, professor of sociology and women's studies at Seoul National University, 24.08.2016. Audio-file.
[35] Yoon Soon Young, The Labor of Women: Work and Family, p.752.

development motivated the Ewha University board to establish Women's Sudy Programme (1977) and then Korean Women's Institute (1979). The creation of the feminism-oriented bachelor's programme was widely publicized in South Korean media. Open debates emerged between women activists and Confucian conservatives. Critics blamed women activists for following the Western ideas and for betraying the national identity. Supporters of the Women's Studies Programme thought that its creation was as natural as electricity or telegraph, which were derived from the West[36].

Since the mid-1970s, the influence of the international women's movement on the formulation of women's policy of the UN member states has gradually increased. From 1975 to 1995, four International Conferences on Women were held. The most notable result of the first conference was the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDW), which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979[37]. All signatories committed themselves to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in their legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women [CEDW, 1979]. South Korea signed the Convention in 1984 and established two organizations to address women's issues: Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI, 1983) and the National Committee on Women's Policies. The KWDI was established under the supervision of the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, and it was responsible for developing women's policy for the government. In 1985, the KWDI elaborated its first plan for women's development, which later was submitted by the National Committee to the government. Thus, the Framework Act on Women's development was adopted. It identified three stages for administrative institutions to implement the tasks of women's development: the consolidation period (the period before 1985), the preparation period (1985-95), and the implementation period (1995-2000)[38]. In 1988, by the appointment of the Second Minister of State for Political Affairs with a special focus on women, the first women's policy machinery in the South Korean government was established. Under the Kim Dae-jung

[36] Ibid., p. 751.
[37] Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm (accessed 10.08.2017)
[38] Kim Seung-kyung, The Korean Women's Movement and the State: Bargaining for Change, p. 26.

presidency, the staff was transferred to the Presidential Commission on Women's Affair (1998) and renamed into Ministry of Gender Equality (MOGE) in 2001, and subsequently into Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) in 2005.

The gender mainstream policy at the global level coincided with a widespread involvement of Korean women in the movement for democratization. In the 1980s, several important female organizations were established: Association for Women's Equality and Friendship (1983, *Yeoseong byeonguhoe*), Korea Women's Hotline (*Hanguk yeoseong jeonhwa*, 1983), Alternative culture (*Tto hanaui munhwa*, 1984), Korean Women's Associations United (*Yeoseong danche yeonhap*, 1987), and Korean Women Workers' Association (*Hanguk yeoseong nodongjahoe*, 1987). All these organizations, to a greater or lesser extent, participated in the movement against the governing authoritarian regime of Chung Doo-hwan. The left-wing female activists were setting the tone for the entire movement, considering that women's liberation was possible only through socio-political transformation. They identified "the governing regime with monopoly capitalism, military fascism, and US imperialism…This paradigm was directly reflected in the women's movement without any filtering"[39]. Until the 1990s, Korean feminist scholars sympathized with this point of view because they were more inclined towards the evolutionist approach of women's liberation. Contrary to the structuralist's point of view, Korean scholars have never thought about "women's oppression in terms of men against women but in terms of political and economic systems"[40]. The successful political changes at the end of 1980s, an abolition of the military regime, influenced the feminism by making it more multifaceted and flexible.

Conclusion

The amendment to the Constitution in 1987 was a watershed in the socio-political and economic development of South Korea. The starting political and economic liberalization of the governing regime symbolized a finishing line of the long route of Koreans towards a modern nation-state that is based on democracy, pluralism and the rule of law. This does not mean that the nation-building process has stopped at this point of the historical route, but it essentially changed the tasks for further national

[39] Ibid., p. 28.
[40] Yoon Soon Young, The Labor of Women: Work and Family, p.754.

development. The women's movement responded to the ongoing socio-political transformations by formulating new challenges for women's development. They demanded to introduce quotas for the legislative assemblies and governmental committees to increase a political participation of women in Korea. At the end of 1980s – early 1990s, the majority of Korean women shared the opinion that inception of quotas will lead to equal opportunities for men and women in the decision-making process[41]. The younger generation tended to prefer female candidates at elections more than the older one, which decreased discrimination against women in politics[42]. Women's organizations launched a series of campaigns for legal reforms, providing education for future female leaders and for enhancing public awareness of gender equality in political areas[43]. As a result of the continuous efforts of women's movement, gender quotas were first introduced in South Korea in 2000 (30 percent quotas for female candidates in proportional representation lists, and subsequently increased to 50 percent quotas in 2004). The adoption of the gender quotas allowed to strengthen political empowerment of women, thus opening new possibilities for young women to enter politics.

Important changes have occurred in the family law. In 2005, National Assembly finally passed a bill abolishing the family-head system (*hojuje*). Due to an active persuasion by women deputies as well as the continuous pursuit by women's organizations, the last remnant of the Confucian-based family law was abolished. Although the conservative groups, such as Korean Clan Leaders Federation, Alliance for the Korean Orthodox Family Institution, Mothers for Saving the Nation, tried to prevent abolishing of *the hojuje*, within new socioeconomic and political circumstances, the majority of Koreans no longer supported their views on family relationships. Along with the revision of the Family Law, in the 2000s many other laws were adopted to embody gender equality and guarantee women's rights in South Korea. All these measures undermined

[41] Chun Kyung Ock, 'Women's Political Empowerment in Korea: Legitimacy and Prospects', *Asian Women* 2, 1996, p. 43.
[42] Park Kyung-Ae, 'Political Representation and South Korean Women', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 58, No.2, 1999, p. 440.
[43] Oh Kyung Jin, 'Women's Political Participation in South Korea and Activist Organizations', *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 22(3), 2016, p. 340; Lee Hui-suk, *Local Self-Government and Women's Political Empowerment* (지방자치와 여성의 정치세력화), Seoul: Dasan chulpansa, 2016, pp. 79-86.

the foundations of patriarchy and of the Confucian approach to women's social role, making the South Korean society more receptive to the feminist rhetoric